

SACRED TIME AND SPACE: THE FESTIVAL OF SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUAYLAS (ANCASH, PERU)

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L'idée même d'une cérémonie religieuse éveille l'idée de fête. Inversement, toute fête, alors même qu'elle est purement laïque par ses origines, a certains caractères de la cérémonie religieuse, car dans tous les cas, elle a pour effet de rapprocher les individus, de mettre en mouvement les masses et de susciter ainsi un état d'effervescence, parfois même de délire, qui n'est pas sans parenté avec l'état religieux (Durkheim 1968:547).

Rituals are important in the life of man: important events are marked by means of coherent actions which often are symbolic. They may be seen as a kind of living theatre in which the participants pronounce fixed texts and act along fixed lines. These texts and actions are the key to the most important norms and values of a culture. By converting ideas, products of the mind, into material objects, we give them relative permanence. These expressive actions are the material representation of abstract ideas, called "ritual condensation" by Leach.

The participants in a ritual are sharing communicative experiences through many different sensory channels simultaneously: verbal, musical, choreographic, and aesthetic 'dimensions' are all likely to form components of the total message. When we take part in such a ritual we pick up all these messages at the same time and condense them into a single experience (Leach 1976:37-41).

Music and dance are forms of ritual condensation which may be observed during festivals, be they profane or sacred, private or public. Through them people find ways of communicating, be it verbally or nonverbally, what is important to them, and of establishing a feeling of togetherness, of belonging to the same kind of people.

The great majority of ceremonial occasions are "rites of transition", which mark the crossing of boundaries between one social category and another.

During a ritual the participants find themselves in the center of the world, a cosmos where order and harmony reign. But this harmonious order cannot exist without its counterpart: chaos.

The Meaning of the Festival

All over the world people mark out their calendars by means of festivals, which are a way of ordering time; the year's progress is marked by a succession of festivals. They may belong to the yearly cycle of economical activities (harvesting, cattle branding) or the yearly cycle of religious festivities. These communal events, be they religious or secular, are "cyclic", e.g. they are

repeated at certain intervals, like the religious festivals or civic holidays. Contrary to this, private events (except birthdays) are “linear” rites of transition that occur only once in a lifetime, like baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The transition is marked by ritual, and the boundaries—in time as well as in space—are ambiguous and a source of conflict and anxiety.

The elements of a religious festival, which are forms of ritual, are sacred as well as profane: masses and religious processions, fireworks, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and commercial activities. The festival of Saint Elizabeth of Huaylas, which will be discussed below, shows both elements.

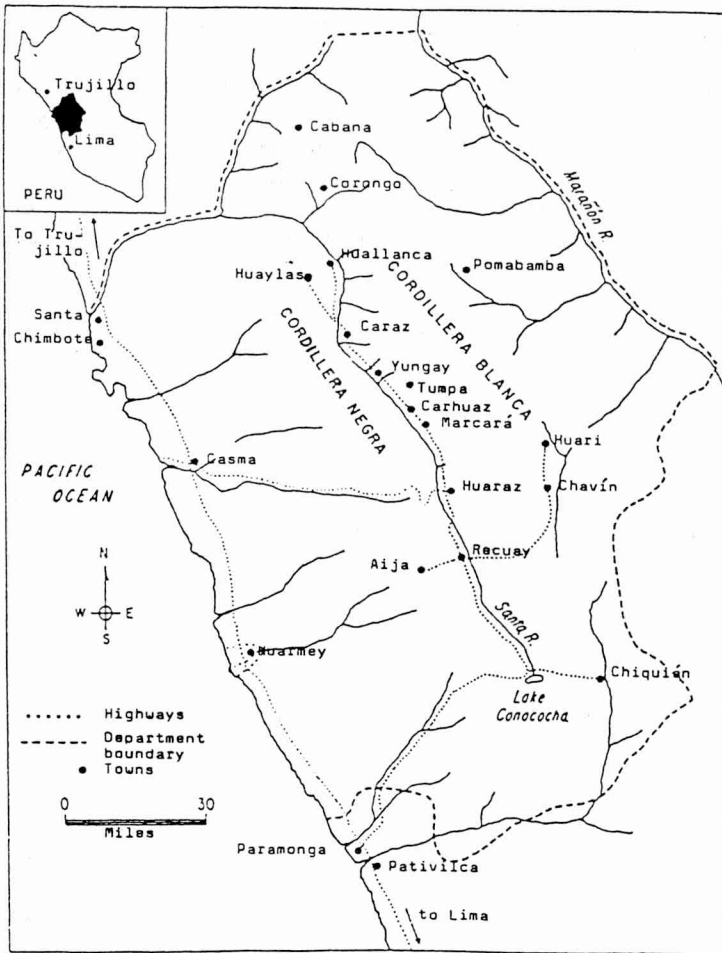


Fig. 1. Department of Ancash, Peru

Huaylas is a small agrarian town in the north of the Callejón de Huaylas, a 150 km-long valley in north-central Peru. It is divided into a number of urban and rural *barrios* (wards), which still reflect the dual system of pre-Columbian times. Delicados, Yácup and Shuyo are the urban wards, formerly the lower moiety, whereas Quécuas, Huayrán, Iscap, Tambo, San Lorenzo and Huaromapuquio are rural wards belonging to the former upper moiety. This division coincides with the division *Mishtis/Indios* (upper class Mestizo/lower class Indian). Between 1960 and 1970 the population of the district of Huaylas amounted to an average of 5,500 persons, 1,200 of which lived "in town". A heavy earthquake in 1970 killed more than 200 people and many survivors migrated to Lima.

Saint Elizabeth: Queen of the Heavens

<i>Reina de los cielos</i>	Queen of the heavens
<i>Reina de los meses</i>	Queen of the months
<i>Santa Isabel</i>	Saint Elizabeth
<i>Reina de mi tierra</i>	Queen of my homeland
<i>Por ti estoy</i>	Because of you I am
<i>Siempre feliz</i>	Always happy.

<i>Tu siempre serás</i>	You will always be
<i>De Haylas la luz</i>	The light of Huaylas
<i>Siempre reinarás</i>	You will always reign
<i>En mi ciudad</i>	In my town

<i>No dejes jamás</i>	Don't ever stop
<i>De ofrecer bondad</i>	Offering goodness
<i>Danos como ayer</i>	Give us like yesterday
<i>Tu bendición</i>	Your benediction

<i>Madre cariñosa</i>	Loving mother
<i>Madre bondadosa</i>	Bountiful mother
<i>Santa Isabel</i>	Saint Elizabeth
<i>Y nosotros Incas</i>	And we Incas
<i>Te damos hoy</i>	Give you today
<i>La adoración</i>	The adoration

<i>Pájaros y flores</i>	Birds and flowers
<i>Te ofrecemos Virgen</i>	We offer you Virgin
<i>Santa Isabel</i>	Saint Elizabeth
<i>Ya nos retiramos</i>	Now we are leaving
<i>Adiós, adiós</i>	Goodbye, goodbye
<i>Reina de amor</i>	Queen of love

("Adoración", composed by David Flores)

This song is sung during the procession by groups of schoolchildren called "Incaicos". Each barrio has its own musicians and dance groups, including the Incaicos. At one particular festival they were dressed in Cuzco-type costumes and carried braided slings that are cracked like whips. They are accompanied by one or two violins, one or two harps, and sometimes a man-

dolin. They participate in the processions as well as in a contest, representing events from the time of the Conquest, such as the murder of the last Inca Atahualpa by Francisco Pizarro. Moreover, they sing and dance "*huaynos*" that describe the beauty of Huaylas and express their attachment to the homeland.



Fig. 2. Saint Elizabeth and Virgin Mary

The official patron saint festival of Huaylas is that of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on August 15th. However, the festival of Saint Elizabeth, Patroness of the Harvest, is a competing festival that attracts many people. It is an example of the synchronization of Roman Catholic practices with a pre-Columbian agricultural rite. The statue portrays two figures, the Virgin Mary embracing Saint Elizabeth, and together they represent the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Saint Elizabeth (Figure 2). It is the only statue portraying paired holy figures; in profile they resemble double ears of maize, a symbol for fertility (Doughty n.d.:34–5). Saint Elizabeth is commemorated by Catholics on the 2nd of July, her "true" day. However, because of fights between the Indios and the Mishtis, the authorities decreed that the Mishtis celebrate on the 8th and the Indios on the 2nd of July. Nowadays, the 8th is the principal day of the festival (Doughty n.d.:14), which lasts from July 1st–10th.

Each barrio has its own musicians: a flute and a drum played simultaneously by one man (*caja y roncadora*) or a brass band (*banda*), Incaicos and other dance groups, and Pashas. The Pashas are men dressed in long multi-colored capes with hoods or crowns with plumes, mirrors, and ribbons. They wear masks and carry plaited leather whips of about four meters with a strand of leather or string at the end. Each barrio has about 40 Pashas, who

dance around the plaza cracking their whips and talking in falsetto voices so that they cannot be recognized (Figure 3). They often carry squashes or stalks of maize: this is related to the fact that Saint Elizabeth is the patroness of the harvest. The leading Pasha wears a sash with the name of the barrio on it.



Fig. 3. *Pashas: costumed male performers carrying long whips at the fiesta of Saint Elizabeth of Huaylas.*

The first days of July are assigned to the smaller, mostly Indian barrios: Huaromapuquio, Iscap and Huayrán. They arrive with *caja y roncadora* players, Incaicos and Pashas. The 6th of July "belongs" to the barrio of Quécuas and its sub-barrio Nahuinyacu; their residents come accompanied by *bandas*, Incaicos and Pashas. In the afternoon the *bandas* of all the barrios arrive for the *rompe* (start of the festival) and at night allegorical floats symbolizing the arrival of the Spaniards parade around the plaza, accompanied by their *bandas*. At the end of the evening barrio Shuyo lights fireworks, in anticipation of "their" day.

The 7th is Shuyo's day, with a mass, a procession, dancers and musicians. In the afternoon, the barrio of Delicados receives the rural barrios with their *bandas* on the outskirts of town and accompanies them to the *plaza* (square), via an ancient trail behind the church. One by one, the groups of Pashas enter the plaza, shouting and cracking their whips in a haze of dust.

Afterwards, a music and dance contest is held between the barrios and later a public dance is held on the plaza, with all the *bandas* playing. In the evening, a social dance is held in the civic center, organized by the Council of Huaylas. Late at night fireworks are lit by the barrio Delicados.

However, on the 8th—Delicados' day—all barrios participate because it is the Main Day. In the morning a solemn mass is read by the parish priest, and early in the afternoon it is barrio Yácup's turn to greet the rural barrios on the outskirts of town. During the procession each barrio takes the statue of Saint Elizabeth a short distance around the plaza (see Fig. 4).

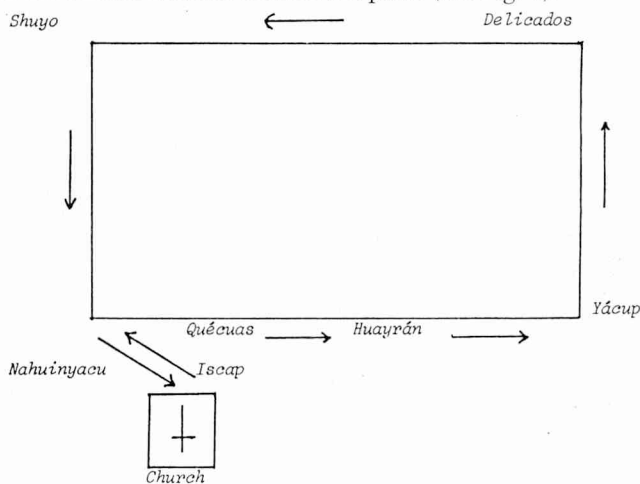


Fig. 4. Processions and barrios

Barrio Iscap takes the image out of the church to the closest corner, a very short distance, from where barrio Quécuas carries it half a plaza-length and barrio Huayrán the other half. From there, the town-barrios of Yácup, Delicados, and Shuyo accompany the image for whole stretches of the plaza at a time. Finally, barrio Nahuinyacu takes it back into the church. The different statuses of the barrios are reflected in the amount of space and time they are allowed to pay homage to Saint Elizabeth: barrio Delicados, being the "owner" of the plaza, gets to take the image on the longest stretch, whereas the rural barrios accompany her on much shorter stretches.

The 9th of July is barrio Yácup's day. In the afternoon the contest is repeated, after which all the barrios receive a diploma. A final public dance is held in the plaza, with all the *bandas* playing.

On the 10th of July everyone goes home and Huaylas returns to its former state: a quiet little town high in the Andes.

Order and Chaos

A festival such as that of Saint Elizabeth is an expression of order as well as chaos. Order in as far as the community is represented and *communitas* is experienced, chaos where expressions of liminality and the accompanying role-reversal may be noticed.

Turner (1969:96) defines *communitas* as "a moment in and out of time" which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.

Lévi-Strauss calls music (and myth) instruments for the obliteration of time, which coincides with Turner's statement:

It is fascinating to consider how often expressions of *communitas* are culturally linked with simple wind instruments and stringed instruments. Perhaps, in addition to their ready portability, it is their capacity to convey in music the quality of spontaneous human *communitas* that is responsible for this (Turner 1969:165).

The central function of the festival is to give occasion for people to rejoice together, to interact in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. Thus, the festival is (and can be used as) a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance (Smith 1975:9).

Order is reflected in the music and dance during the procession, which may be seen as a rite of intensification and solidarity.

Communitas is closely related to liminality and role-reversal. Liminality—structural ambiguity experienced during transition from one role to another—is frequently found in cyclical and calendrical ritual, usually of a collective kind, in which, at certain culturally defined points in the seasonal cycle, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. Such rites may be described as "rituals of status reversal". They are often accompanied by robust verbal and nonverbal behavior, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors (Turner 1969:167).

The Pashas can be considered a case of role-reversal: they wear masks and speak in falsetto voices, so that they cannot be recognized. Because of this anonymity they are free to make fun of people. They have to register with the authorities, so that they can be apprehended in case of irregularities. The barrio-officials constantly escort them, forming a barrier between the groups of Pashas in order to prevent the break-out of fights reflecting barrio rivalry.

These ritualistic class and moiety confrontations can be seen as examples of chaos. Rivalry between the barrios is also reflected in the length—in time and space—during which they accompany the image in the procession. Their status is visible in the types of music they engage: the rural barrios are accompanied by the traditional *cajas y roncadoras*, whereas the urban barrios engage *bandas*, some of which are considered among the best of the Callejón de Huaylas. Having large groups of Pashas and Incaicos who perform well also reflects favorably upon the barrio.

Sacred and Profane

The sacred is symbolized by the image of Saint Elizabeth and Maria. They may be considered an example of "hiérophanie", the manifestation of the sacred, of a reality which is not of our world, in objects that form an integral part of our "natural" and "profane" world. During the festival the plaza of Huaylas is the Center of the World, a sacred space, where Heaven and Earth are connected by means of the image of Saint Elizabeth and Mary (Eliade 1965:17, 38).

The church and the adjoining plaza are sacred territory during the procession, and the plaza serves as a field of ritual action where the music and dance are manifestations of the sacred. The musicians, dance groups and Pashas participate in the processions, walking slowly backwards, facing the image while slowly bowing. The Pashas form two lines and the Incaicos and other dance groups walk in-between them.

The *bandas* of each barrio play religious music while accompanying the image. When a barrio takes over on its corner, prayers are said, hymns are sung and fireworks ignited. The *bandas* then remain in their respective corners, playing joyful *huaynos*.

The profane is represented by the merchants, food- and ice-vendors and photographers that come to do business in Huaylas during the festival. The profane music and dance consist of the *rompe* on the evening of July 6th, the contest, the public dance and the social dance on the 7th of July.

The contest between the barrios takes place on the plaza, where temporary bleachers are constructed for the audience and the judges. The Incaicos of all barrios perform, accompanied by their musicians: after singing a *pasacalle* and some *huaynos*, a drama is performed that centers on Inca history and myth. After the Incaicos the *bandas* play a number of pieces, as varied as possible: a march, a *marinera*, a waltz, a *huayno* and a *pasacalle*. The Pashas clown around among the onlookers.

These contests were deliberately conceived by the district mayor as a way of diminishing the violence of the festival and to channel the latent rivalries and animosities, under high ceremonial conditions.

The social dance is very much a mestizo affair, with high entrance fees and well-dressed Huaylinos from Lima attending.

Despite the sacred character of the masses and processions, the secular drive of the festival never ceases. The combination of exuberance and piety, of religious passion and secular pleasure contribute to the same ends: the celebration of life's renewal, the community's viability and glorification of the deities.

Past and Present

The folk dramas performed by the Incaicos may represent a longing to forget the Spanish Conquest and may harbour nationalistic sentiments and pride in the Inca forefathers.

Wachtel (1971:65–98) compares dances from the Andes with those of Guatemala and Mexico and concludes that the Conquest is revived in Indian folklore. This folklore preserves the memory of the reactions of the Indians to the Conquest, although not always historically correct, and with this message not always perceived as such by the present-day Indians. The collective memory preserves and transmits the memory of the past.

According to Smith (1975:85–95), ritual drama may indicate an ideological counter-movement from the general excultrative movement of Indian to Mestizo, a search for identity and a rejection of the dominant urban culture.

Van Kessel (1980, 1981) relates the dual organization of Andean society to the choreographic structure of the dances, specifically in the formation of hierarchically ordered parallel rows that occurs in many dances. He postulates that these religious dances are not just an ancient pre-Columbian tradition or a regressive or indigenous movement, but rather a cultural adaptation towards modernization and the integration of a subculture into its surrounding modern society.

Doughty (n.d.:3, 5) argues that Huaylas has maintained its discrete life ways, has adjusted to critical changes, and continues successfully in the context of its historic identity. One of the major signs of such cultural viability and factors aiding continuity is the presence of effective mechanisms of *comunitas* that operate at the community level, in this case the annual fiesta of Saint Elizabeth. He goes on to say that the ceremonial events that are related to religious practice serve numerous integrative, explanatory and expressive functions for individuals, groups, and the community at large. The fiesta of Saint Elizabeth illustrates three of them:

- (1) The expression of the social, structured character and operation of the community, often utilizing what Turner (1969:176ff.) calls the “rituals of status reversal” as the vehicle for such demonstration;
- (2) The theatrical enactment on a calendrical rhythm of acts which reinforce relationships and socialize any neophytes as to the character of the social system, thus revitalizing it;
- (3) The provision of means for the controlled recognition of significant new events, influences or crises, and by these means bringing such affairs into the ongoing context of community life.

The festival shows the structure of the society in question in a compact form, like a blueprint, and is a statement of how things are in a particular year, depending on the economical and political situation: who carries the image, who is at the social dance, and who is at the center of attention. As Doughty (n.d.:24) puts it: “The fiesta not only subjects community officials

and leaders to review, but the whole social order is in effect submitted to a ceremonial inspection."

In a form of "total theatre", the society is enacted, with all its contradictions and particularities, providing a context for an exploration of the cultural identity of the Huaylinos. Music, dance and theatre express how they think about themselves.

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